

The longevity of fashion retail stores: organization, brand and design

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Introduction

The concept of the longevity of retail stores is complex and only slowly gaining acceptance. In part this is due to the different approaches and practices evident in the market positioning of retail brands and also attitudes towards design and the use of materials. The aim of this paper is to define the fashion retail landscape in order to understand the potential for more sustainable interior retail designs and to analyse types of sustainability in fashion retail. It recognizes that a sustainable retail design approach will require an enduring balance between economic, environmental protection and equity concerns (Ilić and Stanković 2013). Moreover, drawing on the concept of a circular economy, a more informed approach is required to the use of resources obtained from the environment and how waste becomes a resource and is recycled within the process (Bonviu 2014).

Literature Review

The fashion store lifecycle includes the design, installation and maintenance of the store interior and recognizes a lifespan that separates short-term or temporary processes and long-term instalment or permanent fixtures and fittings components (Mesher 2010). The relationship between the fashion brands and the fashion store interior environment are complex. An important contributor to this complexity is the growth of fast fashion, the predominant form of mass-market fashion, which aims to attract customers into stores as frequently as possible in order to increase the sales of the latest fashions (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006). Fast fashion companies combine short product cycles, while offering fashion items characterized by brand identity and affordable prices (Cachon and Swinney 2011) in a shopping environment that has a visual appeal and offers a unique brand experience (Morrison et al. 2011).

Interior design and fashion are connected at many different levels, in which the outcome of

their relationships is presented in various forms. Many retailers use a standardized approach to fixtures and fittings and a less intensive use of fixtures to reduce costs as well as smaller floor spaces, a trend that reflects the reduction in inventory levels (Francis 2013). By contrast, since the 1980s, many high-end fashion stores have collaborated with signature architects and interior design teams to create unique brands, from boutique-chic to department stores (Curtis et al. 2011). Alongside these trends, retailers are increasingly integrating environmentally responsible practices into their operations (Creyer, 1997; Carrigan and Attalla, 2001). However, although environmentally sustainable interior design has become a major issue in interior design practice, interior designers are still limited in their sustainable choices (Hayles 2015).

The process of sustainable retail store design involves decisions about store exteriors and interiors that need to match practical features with a visual appeal that offer a unique brand experience (Morrison et al. 2011). Interior designers have the power to influence and educate their clients about the advantages of sustainable living and promote this practice. Encouraging the use of sustainable materials through design can reduce the overall project cost. Materials that utilize less energy during production, for example wood, bamboo, and stone are categorized as low embodied energy materials while materials like concrete, plastics, and steel have high embodied energy.

Many countries place significant emphasis on sustainable design, net-zero energy buildings and have implemented regulations to help resolve problems associated with sustainable development. However, research shows sustainable materials still lack investment to meet growing environmental concerns about a sustainable industry and supply chain operations (Longo 2012). Moreover, the Thai fashion retail design industry still lacks an

integrated design process, which is associated with sustainable designs and development (Winchip 2011). This paper provides new insights into fashion brands' selection of sustainable materials for their stores and their longevity.

Methodology

A qualitative methodology was used and the research was undertaken in in three representative shopping locations in Bangkok over an eighteen month period. In the first phase international stores and Thai multiple retailers were observed and field notes taken about their design characteristics. In the second phase, interviews were conducted with retail designers, retail managers and contractors. Documentation from suppliers to the Thai retail market was also researched. The interview uses a mix of open questions and closed questions to obtain different points of view on designer experience also. The findings from the first phase showed the difference in material usage between the international brands and Thai high street fashion brands. The observations and interview data were analysed using thematic coding. At the first stage of of responsibility, fashion store life cycle, brand identity, knowledge of sustainability and financial management. In a second stage of analysis, the codes were refined and patterns identified. In the final, third stage they were further reduced to three themes which were the fashion store lifecycle, including longevity and sustainability in interior store design, consideration of materials selection and responsibility for the selection of materials.

Findings

The findings demonstrated the complex and sometimes contradictory roles of participants in decision-making and implementation. Store design was shown to include the installation and maintenance of the store interior and to recognize a lifespan that separated short-term or temporary processes and long-term instalment or permanent fixtures and fittings components.

In theme one, the fashion store lifecycle, the temporal dimension of the store lifespan influenced the retailer's conformance to regulations, ease of installation of materials, frequency of changing the store design and following seasonal trends. The findings illustrate that normally every store has a rental

Theme: 1 Fashion store lifecycle	Theme: 2 Consideration of materials selection	Theme: 3 Materials selection responsibility
Store lifespan	Budget	Deflection of duties and responsibilities
Materials easy to installation	Brand materials requirements	Overlapping Responsibilities
Frequent changing the store design	Knowledge of sustainable materials	The different of International and domestic designers
Following trends of season	Brand policy	Work relationship
	Brand identity	

Figure 1 : Three themes from the findings

contract of around 5-10 years and that the lifecycle of the store requires a major change and redesign approximately every 5 years as it becomes more worn and less attractive to the customer (Figure 2). Brands follow the fashion product lifecycle which effects store layout, where they re-arrange temporary components and promotional materials, to attract customers especially at peak times like mid-year or end of the year.

The analysis shows first, that most respondents did not consider sustainable design as suitable for the fashion retail industry especially in fast fashion or large multiple stores. Most respondents said they never had sustainable materials requirements for any brands and the brands don't want to invest in sustainable materials, apart from some brands in Group B that used natural materials. However, some retailers realize that it is a good idea to invest in good quality materials for the longevity of the store design and the owner of Jaspal brand said it is like a business journey: their brand has learned from their mistakes to improve their sustainability knowledge.

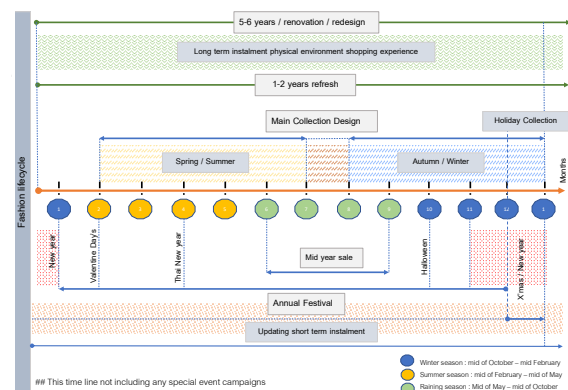


Figure 2: Lifecycle Store Design

consider the lifespan of their stores, and that investing in the longevity of materials is better than using cheap and poor-quality materials and then having to reinvest. In addition, the

owner of the brand expects if they invest in good quality materials, the shop will last for at least eight years before renovation. However, it is difficult and complicated for the brand to continue to update their products so they must find a way for short-term solutions to attract customers.

Theme 2: Materials Selection

The research findings illustrate the limitations of sustainable design practice and processes. First, the most important consideration for every designer and contractor is the brand requirement for consistency between brand concept, budget and style which relates to brand identity. A distinctive barrier to the adoption of sustainable materials lies in the store identity and its very powerful communication effect means retailers find it difficult to make significant changes.

Many interior designers had significant worries about the brand identity and how to design the store, was related to selection of materials. The interior designer in Group B who worked for Peace projects agreed the idea of zero waste had a lot of advantages for business and she preferred to use domestic materials. She studied sustainability, so has some knowledge but if someone doesn't have any experience it is difficult to have a perspective.

In the past five years, fashion retail stores in Thai market have changed their use of fixtures and fittings components in store design, with a trend to use moveable components, particularly in fast fashion stores. The retailers in Group A (large multiple brands) applied this concept to new stores by changing from a built-in to a flexible and moveable strategy, to have the space to support the fashion lifecycle. The briefs also require flexible modern displays,

modular showcases, easy replacement of individual pieces and easy maintenance. The manager of store design (Group A) said this trend has had a positive impact on designers who have to think through about how to create the multiple spaces to support the moveable or flexible components when changing seasonal displays.

A barrier to sustainable design can be formed where a brand's policy does not support a longevity strategy, typically found in Group A (Large multiple brands) and Group C (International brands including luxury brands and high street fashion brands). Luxury or high-end brands have a high standard of brand identity and exercise control over its quality and replication through copyright protection. Thus, these brands have a very strict brand policy about design process. Figure 2 demonstrates the organization of luxury brands for the store design process. Normally, every season the international brands have to change window displays and arrange the store environment for example Burberry's main office will send all components equipment for installation to the retail designer or visual merchandise in Thailand to set it up by following their every component must not be reused after finishing the project, it needs to be demolished and thrown away or sent back.

Theme 3: Selection of the materials responsibility

Organisational roles and responsibilities in the fashion retail industry can overlap depending on brand or store positioning. The findings demonstrate the importance of the responsibilities of different actors in the working processes of fashion retail store design. Moreover, they show how the choice of materials should be balanced with other factors

(Export Transportation)

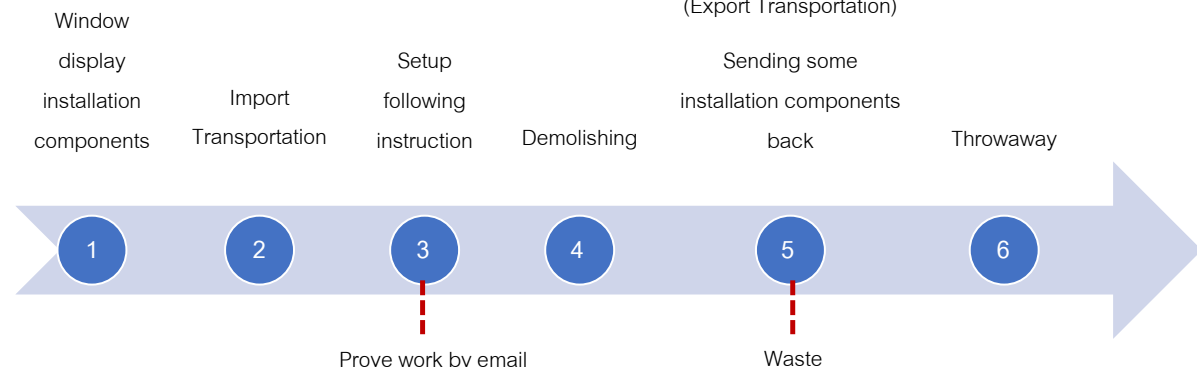


Figure 3: Selection of materials responsibility

to achieve sustainable outcomes. Sustainable material selection is often the last option that key participants – retailers, designers and contractors - will think about (Figure 4). The respondents in each category had conflicting perspectives, blaming each other about the selection of sustainable material not being their responsibility. For example, the Retailers in group A said the brand didn't have knowledge or experience about design, so, they blame the designers who must take responsibility to give the brand advice about which sustainable material is suitable for their brand and support their brand identities. Concurrently, the designer groups A and C strongly disagree: every design follows the brief or the brand requirements which states that it is the retailer's responsibility to be clear about the sustainability concept in the early stages of the process.

Meanwhile, contractors in Group A see the responsibility for selecting the materials as the designer's, they have to follow the interior

designers' materials specification. Thus, they say all of the design and material specification is the designer's responsibility, which the contractor is not allowed to change without permission. For Thai brands every interior designer has a responsibility to select the materials, but Thai designers that work for international brands did not have a chance to choose they only have an opportunity to compare between similar materials in the markets. Even though most Thai interior designers have an opportunity to choose materials, the findings show they often use common materials as there is less time to do research. Importantly, respondents from Group A, B and C believe that there is a lack of choice of sustainable materials. Contractors avoid sustainable and good quality of the materials because the price is very high, they prefer to use other familiar materials which are cheaper. When the interior designer has more information about materials, such as sustainable materials, local materials and international materials, it means the retailers have more choice to choose which is the best and most suitable for the brand.

Conclusion

This research has identified barriers to the selection of materials with a longer life in the store design. The thematic analysis confirms how store lifecycles continue to have an important influence on the selection criteria of readily available and commonly used materials, which relate to cost and brand policy considerations. A second barrier to the selection of materials is that many respondents are lacking opportunities to research and acquire detailed knowledge about sustainable materials and choices in the market. Finally, the findings demonstrate that it is not only interior designers' responsibility to select the sustainable materials for the store design, but retailers, interior designers and contractors need to help each other to support the sustainable ideas, so there needs to be a balance between the three key players. All of them must collaborate, communicate, and organize themselves more in the early-stages of design in order to understand the same cohesive direction in which the brand wants to drive sustainability to move forward to a sustainable fashion retail store.

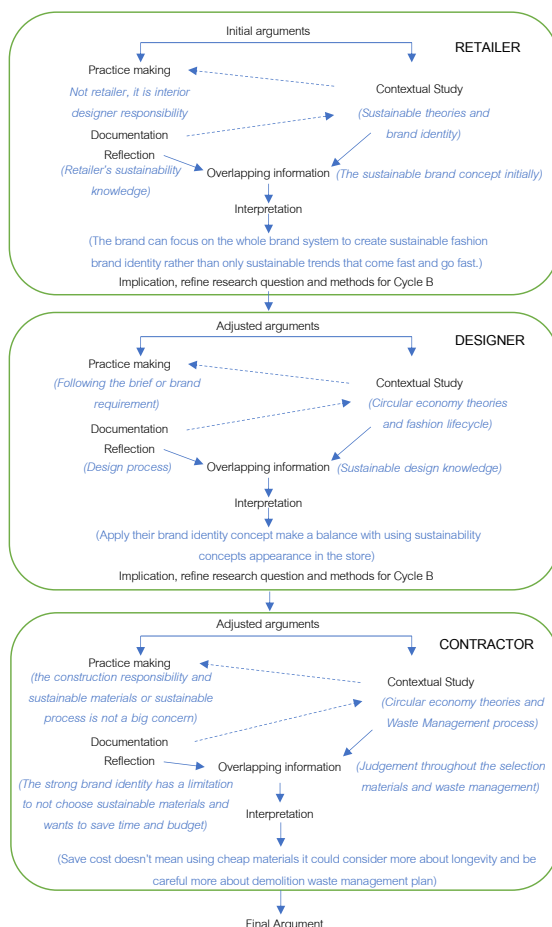


Figure 4: Theme 3 Development of responsibility

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